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X196 over to the Small Island, so now, after being assisted by them in hauling the logs up to the dancing-ground, the men of the home-village alone (presumably those of the introducing "line") drag them up, towards the end of the day, into the *ghamal* where the work of hollowing them out takes place.

X196 ● 322 [791] RITES ACCOMPANYING THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE GONGS

Behak. Expert marks position for the slit.

Once safely lodged in the *ghamal*, a day is appointed, five or six days ahead, for a rite called *behak*, when an expert magician [1] marks out on each log the exact length and position of the slit through which it is to be hollowed out, and which, when finished, will form the two "lips" of the gong.

On this day the owners of the future gongs cut down branches of the nettle-plant called *ro-kalat* and place them under both ends of each log. This is to facilitate the hollowing out of the gongs, as, the wood of the nettle being very soft, it will sympathetically affect the wood of the gongs; if the logs were to rest on hardwood props they would be correspondingly hard to cut.

This having been done, the expert comes to mark on them the position of the slit. For this purpose he brings with him a pliable creeper of a kind called *piriov*, from which the slit takes its name, and with it measures the circumference of the trunk. Having cut down the creeper so that the two ends meet exactly round the log, he then takes it away and places it alongside a stick of native sugar-cane (*na-tôv*), which he also cuts so as to be equal in length to the creeper. Then he places both creeper and sugar-cane longitudinally along the surface of the log, and at either end of them lays transversely a twig of scented herb (*hokuri*) of a special kind called *tena ker-keriel*. Then he takes a shell adze of the kind called *tele*,[2] and with it delivers a succession of blows on the whole length of the sugar-cane, the expelled juice of which leaves a mark on the surface of the log. Finally, removing the sugar-cane and creeper, he chips along this mark with his adze just sufficiently to indicate the position of the slit to those who are going to hollow out the trunk.

While performing these acts, the magician sings special incantations in a low voice so that those watching him may not hear.

I was told that the creeper has no magical properties, being used only for convenience, but that both sugar-cane and herb are invested with magical import (*ne-man*). One special property of the native sugar-cane is its red colour.

[1] Called *mara man* (see p. 349).

[2] Connected with the Atchin *tel-teli*, meaning "hard." Atchin has *tala* and *til-til* for the two chief kinds of shell adze (see Layard, 1, Nos. 94-96, 103, 105, 276).

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The practical result of the performance, probably based on an acoustic principle that is beyond the range of my own knowledge, is that the length of the slit is made equal to the exterior circumference of the gong.

A fowl is killed and given, together with a live pig, as payment to the magician, and tidings are sent round to all the Vao villages announcing what has been done, the messengers taking with them to each village a message-yam decorated with croton leaves together with a single killed pig for which, being for food only, no sacrificial signal is sounded. This pig is called *masoamp*, a word of which I did not enquire the exact meaning, but is probably compounded from *mas*, meaning "provisions," and *oamp*, which, when applied in the form of *tamat-oamp* to the ghosts of men slain in battle, indicates absence of mortuary rites, in this case represented by the absence of the sacrificial signal. This pig is probably made the occasion of a *masean* feast, being one for which the recipients have not previously worked.

Skilled gong-makers hollow out the gongs, which are surrounded by a screen.

Skilled workers are now called for to assist in hollowing out the gongs. I will call them the gong-makers. These may be taken from any village and from either "line." Usually those who have previously worked at successful gongs are chosen.

A screen, called *na-lit*, is built inside the *ghamal*, and no one may enter it except those who are working on the gongs. Once the work has been started it must not be discontinued from sunrise to sundown, and to maintain this standard the workers are organised into shifts. When any one shift gets tired the workers composing it come out from behind the screen into the *ghamal* while the next shift takes up the uninterrupted work. While resting, the gong-makers are supplied with magnificent puddings. Not until nightfall may the work cease, and it must be resumed again before sunrise on the following morning. From the time the work is begun until the gongs are finished none of the workers may leave the *ghamal*, except only to relieve nature.

Restrictions imposed during hollowing out.

During this time no person of the home-village, man or woman, may have any sexual connexion, nor may they step over the buttress root of a *gha-tambol* tree, nor drink water, nor may they eat fish, nor the fruit of the *tawò* tree, nor anything that is roasted on stones. If yams are to be roasted the greatest care must be taken that there are no stones in the place where the fire is made. At the beginning of this period the list of these restrictions is publicly announced by the magician. All those subject to them are said to be *vel-val*, a word meaning "sacred" or "taboo." [1]

[1] See p. 400.

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These restrictions apply primarily to the Maki-men and their wives, on whom they are absolutely binding. Their application to other members of the village is not quite so stringent; if one of these, however, were to break, say, the rule against sexual intercourse, he would be careful not to handle any of the food that is to be taken to the workers. The restrictions do not apply to the married daughters of the Maki-men, living as they do in another village, but if one of these has sexual intercourse with her husband at this time she may not come into the home-village.

The gong-makers themselves are not subject to any of the restrictions on food, though the restrictions on walking and on sexual intercourse are implied in their confinement within the precincts of the *ghamal*.

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Expert "puts the voice into the gongs"; expert and gong-makers sound them, and others inspect.

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From time to time the expert pays a visit to the *ghamal* to see how the gongs are progressing and to instruct the workers.

When he sees that the work is finished,[1] he appoints a day, about three days ahead, when he will come and "put the voice [2] into the gongs." The restrictions on the villagers continue to be imposed until this is performed. The gong-makers also remain in the *ghamal* till, on the day before the ceremony, they make ready for it by going down to the sea to seek a hole [3] in the reef on to which the waves break with a resonating sound. As the water splashes up from this hole they catch the spray in bamboos and conch shells, saying that they are catching the voice of the hole, and carry it back to the *ghamal*.

Next day the expert comes and goes alone behind the screen and, singing softly over the spray, pours it, and with it the voice of the resounding waves, into the gongs. Then he sounds the gongs in turn, giving four [4] strong strokes to each, so that everyone hears the sound and knows that the new gongs are finished.

Then all the gong-makers enter the screen, pay the expert with money-mats, penis-sheaths and other articles, and then sound the gongs again. Finally, the general public is admitted to inspect the gongs, though they are not permitted to sound them.

Velal danced in rotation.

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The gongs being now ready, the festivities leading up to their erection and subsequent consecration begin by the members of the introducing "line," followed by those of all the Vao villages, coming in prescribed rotation at intervals of several days to perform the preliminary circular

[1] I have no record of who carves the faces on the gongs. This work is presumably done by the expert himself.
[2] *halaghan*. [3] *herum*.
[4] Four is the number most frequently used in magic; see p. 644.

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